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# His Dinner for Two

PLAYLET IN ONE ACT

DICK & FITZGERALD, Publishers,  
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DICK & FITZGERALD, Publishers, 18 Ann Street, N. Y.

# HIS DINNER FOR TWO

A Comedietta in One Act

BY  
FRANKLIN JOHNSTON

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NEW YORK  
DICK & FITZGERALD  
18 ANN STREET

HE (*drawing the curtain of the book-case*): Not one.

SHE (*slowly drawing off a wedding ring—the only ring she wears*). There's still this. (*Holds it towards him*)

HE. Your wedding ring! (*HE takes it, kisses it, and taking her hand, slips the ring on her finger again. SHE looking away from him*) Never. (*HE walks slowly R. SHE stands L. C. A pause, then BOTH turn towards each other and sigh*)

SHE. Well?

HE. Well?

SHE. To-morrow's Sunday. If we sleep late enough we won't need any breakfast. We dine out, and if we go to bed early enough we won't need any supper.

HE. That carries us to Monday. If something doesn't turn up in Monday's mail we must——

SHE. Must what?

HE. Borrow.

SHE. Borrow? At last we've come to that. But we've held out a long time, haven't we, dear? (*Lays her head on his shoulder*)

HE. A very long time. But Monday isn't here yet.

SHE (*leaving him*). If we *must* borrow, we'll borrow from my relatives. I've brought you poverty and worry, but I won't make *your* relatives suffer too. (*Goes UP stage and stands with back to the audience*)

HE. Nonsense! It's all my fault. Besides, I've robbed your relatives of *you*. You wouldn't have me take all their riches.

SHE (*turning as though struck with a sudden thought*). Borrow from both families!

HE (*smiling*). Rather impartial.

SHE. Have I been partial to you?

HE. You've been altogether too good to me.

SHE. Perhaps. Haven't you anything that looks salable? Anything important?

HE. Well, Alexander Hiller, the young Hercules of the publishing business, has a long piece of mine which he likes, but seems a bit afraid of. He said he would take it home and ask his wife's opinion. I suppose she's used it for curl papers by this time.

SHE. When will he let you know?

HE. It's uncertain. I suppose I might drop in at his office now. He's usually alone and in a good humor at this hour.

SHE. Yes, why don't you go now? I'll get dinner ready while you're gone. But let me see your cuffs. (*HE holds out his arms and SHE looks at his cuffs*) Yes, they need a little

attention. (*Picks up scissors from the table and starts to trim the edges of his cuffs*)

HE. It's a burning shame that you have to do all this house-work. Those hands were never meant to cook for an idle, able-bodied man like me. Why shouldn't *I* do the cooking occasionally?

SHE. If you did the cooking, my dear, we'd both starve. Stop worrying about your wife, (*Satirically*) your poor, unhappy, abused wife. (*Heaves a mock sigh*)

HE. Dolly, you're a ray of sunshine. (*Interrupts the trimming by taking her hands and squeezing them*)

SHE (*after a little gasp at the force of the embrace*). Moonshine. (*Pushes aside his hands and goes on with the trimming*) Ah, I almost forgot. I want you to post a letter for me. (*Finishes the trimming and replaces the scissors on the table*)

HE (*pulling his sleeve down over his cuffs*). That's another stamp gone.

SHE (*adjusting his tie*). I know, but I've two more left; besides, I'm writing to Bessie.

HE. Great Scott! You haven't asked her to dinner again?

SHE. No, but I'm going to the very next time you sell a poem.

HE. I sent a little humorous bit to *Life* yesterday. I should say it would make a very nice little dinner for three.

SHE (*Takes a pen-holder from table, dips the top of it in ink-well and rubs the ink on a spot on his coat*). That's good. Dear me, you really must get a new suit. But you can't afford it now—you had your hair cut yesterday.

HE. If I had that hair here now I'd eat it.

SHE. Eat it?

HE. I mean, I'd spend the money for food.

SHE (*gayly*). You have no excuse for being hungry. Your poetical imagination ought to be able to call up before you feasts fit for a king—or a queen.

HE. It's vivid, I admit, but it has its limitations.

SHE. Now, if you'll wait a moment I'll finish that letter. (*Going to c. d.*)

HE. You ought to hate me for bringing you down to this poverty.

SHE. Are you sorry?

HE. No.

SHE (*standing in c. d.*). Neither am I. (*Smiles back at him*). EXIT C. D.)

HE. (*looking after her. Softly*). Dolly! (*Pause. Comes DOWN stage, looking at his watch*) You go Monday, old boy. Five o'clock. Just time to catch Hiller and get back to dinner. Dinner—I wonder if we *have* anything for dinner! Hang it, I'm going to find out. (EXIT L. D., *whistling. Whistling is heard for a few moments, then suddenly ceases. After a pause. RE-ENTER HE L. D.*) One chop—one solitary chop—and a few unhappy potatoes! Not enough for one sick child, let alone two healthy adults. Dinner; both hungry; both pretending not to be; each urging the other to eat the chop; chop getting cold; finally divide the chop—just enough to make us both famishing. Dolly retires to weep, and I to swear and draw on a pipe that hasn't had any tobacco in it for three days. (*Sits on table*) If publishers weren't such stingy fools!

ENTER SHE C. D., *with a letter.*

SHE (*handing him the letter*). Now, don't forget that. Wait while I get your hat.

HE. Why should *you* get it?

SHE. Because I want to.

[EXIT R. D.]

HE (*walking about*). Two hearts that beat as one. One chop that—something's got to be done about dinner. Like as not she'll make me eat the whole chop and go hungry herself. (*Musing*) This is one of those problems easier for a novelist than a scribbler of verse. Let's see, now. (*Pause*) Ah, hah! That's it! I'll not come home to dinner. I'll tell Dolly I have an engagement to dine out. I'll take a long walk and compose a hymn to starvation, a sonnet to a chop. It won't be the first time I've dined on bread and water, without the bread.

ENTER SHE R. D., *with hat and gloves which she gives to him.*

SHE. There you are. (*Putting her arms about his neck*) You'll think of me all the while you're gone? And you won't look at any other girls? And you'll be back soon?

HE (*hemming to hide his embarrassment*). Er—er—Well, I'm afraid I won't be back soon. In fact, I find I can't be home to dinner to-night. (*SHE slowly withdraws from him, looking at him reproachfully. HE looks guilty and embarrassed*)

SHE. You won't be home to dinner? (*Very coldly*) Oh! (*SHE sits on sofa, L. D., petulant, but not disagreeably so*)

HE (*after a pause*). No, I promised to dine with a couple of friends. (*Draws on gloves*)

SHE (*rising eagerly*). Well, of course I'm invited too?

HE. No. You see, they're Bohemians,—bachelor Bohemians.

SHE. Still, I don't think they ought to come between husband and wife. Why, Jack, we haven't been separated like this since we were married.

HE. I know, dearest, but I'm afraid I must go.

SHE. I think you might have declined the invitation.

HE. Why, how could I, dear?

SHE. Can't you break the engagement?

HE. No, my friends would be disappointed.

SHE. Why? They don't expect to eat you. Jack, I believe you'd really rather go with *them* than spend the evening alone with *me*.

HE. You know better than that. I'd rather not go, but friends are friends, even if one is married. (*Aside*) Confound it, I'm only making matters worse. It won't work. I'll have to stay.

SHE (*weakening*). I was only thinking of myself.

HE. But if you wish it, why of course I'll stay. (*Puts hat on table and begins to remove gloves*) I'll see Hiller on Monday.

SHE (*rushing forward and kissing him*). Ah, you dear! Now I'll cook you a charming little dinner for two.

HE (*aside*). Dinner for two! (*With forced enthusiasm*) Ah, yes, a charming little dinner for two.

SHE (*going towards L. D., then stopping and thinking, comes back to him*) But, yet, no. That would be selfish. You were right and I was wrong. It was very selfish of me to try to keep you at home when you wanted to have a little amusement with your friends.

HE. I wasn't going for amusement, I was going from a sense of duty. I don't want to go; you don't want me to go; I won't go. (*Takes off gloves and throws them on table*)

SHE. Oh, but you must, dear.

HE. But I don't want to.

SHE. You'll want to after you get started. Why, just think, you'll get something to eat cooked by a real cook, not by an amateur like your homely little wife.

HE. Now, why do you call yourself homely?

SHE. Just to hear you deny it, stupid. But you must hurry or you'll be late. (*Hands him hat and gloves*)

HE. Hang it, Dolly, I think I'd better stay.

SHE. You go and have a nice time, and you'll like me all

the better. If you don't see other people once in a while you'll grow tired of me, if you haven't already.

HE. Dolly!

SHE. I thought I could entertain you alone, but—don't worry about me, I'll have a lovely time.

HE. What will you do?

SHE. Read—or something. (BOTH at c. d.) What time will you be back? I want to count the minutes.

HE. Say eight o'clock. (Aside) I forgot about the time.

SHE. Eight o'clock! Why, Jack, you're not going to leave your hosts right after the feast, are you? That would be dreadfully rude.

HE (with significant look to audience). I meant nine o'clock.

SHE (dryly). I shall expect you about twelve.

HE (aside). I'll have to take a mighty long walk to keep this game up.

SHE. Good-bye, dear.

HE. Good-bye, little one. (They kiss) [EXIT c. d.]

SHE. Oh, Jack!

HE (off stage). Yes? (HE reappears at c. d. They kiss again) [EXIT c. d.]

SHE (at c. d., looking after him). Poor, dear Jack! (Comes slowly DOWN stage, trying to control her emotion. Brushes away a tear, then another, then several, then bursts into tears, sinks into chair by table, and cries for a few moments, then starts up) What are you crying about, you silly little fool? As though Jack were growing tired of you! I'm getting to be a jealous, suspicious old cat. (Walks about) Of course he loves me as much as ever. Anyone can see that, but—does he? (Sits) It's my fault—I ought to have been born rich. I ought to have money to lay at my husband's feet. Then we could go out a bit. Money to go to the theatre, money for clothes, so I shouldn't always look the same to him. (Rising) Money for servants—my hands are getting red with housework, red and large, and—Oh! (With a sob) he'll hate me pretty soon. (Walks to c. d., and looks off. Then slowly DOWN stage again) And yet—Oh, I'm sure he still loves me as much as ever, or nearly as much. I know he didn't really want to go to-night. Jack can't deceive me. (Walks about) I don't want any dinner to-night, I feel—oh, I'm a horrid, jealous old thing and ought to feel ashamed of myself—imagining a lot of nonsense about poor, dear Jack. (Picks up manuscript from table) Some of Jack's manuscript. (Kisses



*it. Reads title*) "Modern Marriages." An essay. Modern marriages? What a funny thing for Jack to write about. *(Tosses her head)* As though he knew anything about it! *(Sits at table, reading)* "No subject is more generally discussed"—*(skipping pages)* um-um-um-um. "A common source of danger—a common source of danger is a marriage in which the contracting parties are too young, too sentimental and too romantic to live happily on a small income; too young to realize that the glamour of love must soon wear out, and too inexperienced to adapt themselves successfully to the new order of things." *(Drops the manuscript slowly on table)* Then it's true—he is tired of me, and my poor little dream is over. So soon! Jack! Jack! *(SHE buries her head in her hands on the table, sobbing. A moment's pause)*

HE *(off stage, excitedly)*. Dolly! *(ENTERS excitedly, c. d. Stops short on seeing DOLLY, and the look of joy on his face turns to one of sympathy)* Why, Dolly, there isn't anything wrong, is there? You're not crying?

SHE *(straightening up and trying to look cheerful)*. No. *(Forcing a yawn)* I was almost asleep.

HE. What is it, Dolly? Hang it, something's wrong.

SHE. Why, no. *(Forcing a smile)* Nothing—what put that into your head? *(Almost weeping)* Nothing at all. *(Hysterically)* Oh, I think I hear the chops boiling.

[EXIT *quickly*, L. D.]

HE. She thinks she hears the chops boiling! *(Flings hat on sofa and dashes after her)*

[EXIT L. D.]

ENTER SHE, c. d.

HE *(off stage)*. Dolly! *(SHE starts towards L. D., but stops as HE ENTERS L. D.)*

SHE *(innocently)*. Did you call, dear?

HE. Won't you tell me what's wrong, dearest?

SHE. If you weren't so thick-headed you would guess. But what about your friends? *(Pouting)* Of course they're more important than I am?

HE *(impulsively)*. Dolly! You don't mean *that*. *(Tenderly)* Did you really think I preferred *their* company to *yours*? *(Starts to embrace her)*

SHE *(holding him at bay)*. No, wait a minute. Did you come back because you pitied me, or because you—

HE. Because I love you. *(SHE is about to fling herself into his arms when she suddenly checks herself, remembering the manuscript)*

SHE. Oh, I almost forgot. No, Jack, I'm sorry, but I can't believe you. You came back out of pity. Don't try to deceive me. You know you never could.

HE (*significant look to audience*). Of course not, dear. But upon my honor I came back purely out of——

SHE (*warningly*). Jack!

HE. Why no, by Jove, I didn't either.

SHE. Just as I said.

HE (*hastily*). No, no. Let me explain, Dolly——

SHE. Don't try to. I quite understand.

HE. But, Dolly, you don't——

SHE. Oh, yes, I do. I've been reading this. (*Holds up manuscript*)

HE (*taking it without looking at it*). If you'll give me a chance, I'll tell you what I *did* come back for.

SHE (*quietly, but shaking her forefinger at him*). You came back because your conscience pricked you. But you'll be hardened next time and then your conscience won't prick. (*Turns away*) I was fool enough to think you would always be a lover—at least as long as we were both young—(*Turns facing him*) and fool enough to think you would rather spend the evening with *me* than with your roistering, drunken, Bohemians. (*Turns away with arms folded, and tapping floor with her toe*)

HE (*somewhat amazed*). Dolly, it isn't like you to talk like this. (*Throws manuscript on table*)

SHE (*penitently, facing him, hands folded*). I know it's my fault. I shouldn't have allowed you to marry me. You're too good for me. You're a genius and I'm only a poor, commonplace woman, but I'll always love you, even if—if you—you—(*Turns her head aside, sobbing*)

HE (*catching her in his arms*). You're an angel, dearest! But I'm only a poor fool of a would-be poet who brings poverty and sorrow on his wife because he isn't practical enough to keep books or sell dry-goods. (*Breaks away*) But listen. (*Seriously*) I deceived you about that engagement this evening. I found that there wasn't enough in the flat for both of us to dine to-night, so I thought I would go without for once. I made up the story about the Bohemians, the drunken rois—(*SHE stops his mouth with her hand*)

SHE. Jack, you're a—but, Oh, explain THAT! (*Takes manuscript from table and holds it up before him*)

HE. "Modern Marriages"? Oh, that's young Garret's manuscript. He asked me to criticise it.

SHE. And I kissed it! (*Flings it on floor*) Can you forgive me?

HE. There isn't anything to forgive. (*He gives her a wild embrace*)

SHE (*sighs*). I was almost afraid we were going to have a quarrel. But didn't you have something you wanted to tell me?

HE (*dryly*). Yes, I have been trying to tell you a bit of news, good news.

SHE. Has your uncle——?

HE. No. He's still in excellent health. But I've been offered the position——

SHE. You accepted it?

HE. Yes.

SHE Ah! (*Sighs in relief*)

HE. Of literary critic of "Manning's Weekly," at a salary of fifty dollars per week.

SHE. Oh, Jack, it seems wicked to have so much money.

HE. Wicked?

SHE (*excitedly*). Oh! I don't know what I am saying. It's so suddenly lovely, so—(*Calmly*) You can have a new suit.

HE. And you, new dresses.

SHE. Cigars.

HE. Hats all around.

SHE. And, Oh Jack! I'm starving.

HE. So am I. I borrowed part of my salary in advance. So let's dine out to-night. Some quiet, inexpensive little place.

SHE. Glorious! (*Begins to put on her hat and coat*)

HE. Then the theatre.

SHE. Don't! I'll cry for joy if you keep on.

HE (*picking up manuscript*). Poor Garret's manuscript.

SHE. Don't you think you'd better tell young Garrett to stick to the drug business—or get married?

HE. Why, I haven't read it yet.

SHE. And you love me as much as ever?

HE. Far more.

SHE. And you're not sorry?

HE. No!

SHE (*whispering*). Neither am I. (*SHE gives him a "butterfly" kiss, and the curtain falls as they EXIT C. D.*)

CURTAIN.

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